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Address by Mr. Heth Lorton
before a special meeting.
Society of the Cincinnati
Richmond, Va. 1905.



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ADDRESS

BY

MR. HETH LORTON, TREASURER VIRGINIA CINCINNATI,

DELIVERED BEFORE A SPECIAL MEETING OF

THE SOCIETY OF THE CINCINNATI IN THE STATE OF VIRGINIA

ON DECEMBER THE 15TH, 1905,

IN

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA.

NOTE.—At the above meeting there were present twenty-five members in person and by proxy,
which is the largest meeting held by the Virginia Cincinnati Society
for a period of more than one hundred years.

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ADDRESS

BY

MR. HETH LORTON, TREASURER VIRGINIA CINCINNATI,

IN RICHMOND, VIRGINIA, DECEMBER 15TH, 1905.

GENTLEMEN OF THE VIRGINIA CINCINNATI:

Shortly before our last annual meeting (July 4, 1905), I found, to my deep regret, it would be absolutely impossible for me to attend that meeting, and I made the suggestion at the time to two or three of our members that an effort be made to change our annual meeting date, if possible, to a more desirable season of the year when we would be likely to have larger meetings than if the date was July 4, which is usually the hottest time of the year, and besides, a vacation season when many of our members are likely to be absent.

It was pointed out to me that under the provision of the Original Institution we were compelled to hold our annual meetings on July 4th; and, therefore, could not change the annual meeting date unless the Institution was amended to that effect. This led me to send for a copy of the Institution and make a study of its various provisions. My investigation led me into correspondence with all the other State Societies and some of the General Officers as well. The result of which, to my amazement, was the disclosure that *all* of the State Societies violated the Institution in some respects, and *most* of them in *many* respects, that the General Society did not follow the Institution, and that many prominent Cincinnati members who loudly protested against others for not following the Institution were themselves most regular and persistent violators of many of the clear and distinct provisions of the organic laws of the Order. Thus it is that the whole Cincinnati Society seems to have wandered very far from first principles, and the true intent and meaning of the Founders of the Order, as expressed in the Constitution or what is known as the Institution, and I am sure it will seem proper to you, as it does to me, that some intelligent and systematic effort be made to sound a note of warning at this time, and point out the path which leads back to the observance of the real teaching and principles of the Institution and the intention of the Founders of the Order.

What is needed in the Cincinnati Society to-day is *uniformity* in its government, customs, rules and methods and a clear and distinct defining of the authority, duties, powers, and functions of the General Society, the General Officers and the various State Societies, and these things should be made so plain that each member of the whole Society will perfectly understand them. The General Society itself is powerless to accomplish these results

for the simple reason that the Institution does not give it such authority, and all the "ordinances," "resolves," so-called "precedents" and "interpretations" of the General Society cannot change or alter the organic law of the Order. In fact, it seems almost a travesty for the General Society or the General Officers to attempt to do such things, as the action of the General Society in the matters referred to is limited solely to *suggestions* to the State Societies and has no legal or binding effect whatever unless *all* the State Societies ratify and confirm it, and this fact is fully recognized by all the State Societies.

Between the 14th and 25th of last November I was able to complete a series of resolutions and By-Laws, which, at the suggestion of our Vice-President and our Secretary (the President of the Society was abroad at that time), were sent out to the Virginia Cincinnati in order that you might be fully informed, in advance of this meeting, as to the matters that would come up. I also sent to each member a copy of the Institution, which probably many of our members had never seen before, and likewise a copy of my correspondence with each of the other State Societies. You will thus see the matters I am bringing up to-day have not been suddenly sprung on this meeting. As all of you are aware, I have made a careful and exhaustive study of the whole situation, and I have fully posted each one of our members, weeks in advance of this special meeting, both as to the results of my investigations and the matters that would be brought to your attention to-day. So all of us are thus able to take up each of these subjects intelligently and make final disposition of them at this meeting. The business is important and it needs prompt attention at our hands.

As you must be aware the Virginia Society is in a weak and languishing condition. We have been "revived" for fifteen (15) years and admitted to full membership for nine (9) years and yet to-day we have but thirty-three (33) Hereditary and one (1) Honorary members on our rolls out of an original membership of two hundred and seventy-nine (279) and over. I do not know if any of the above thirty-four (34) members of the Virginia Society are dead. Several letters have been mailed by me to our Secretary asking for information on this subject, but so far I have received no response from him. I would be glad to have our Secretary inform this meeting on this important subject.

The Virginia Society seems to be drifting along in a hap-hazard, happy-go-lucky sort of way, and with no special and earnest effort being made to restore our Society to its former large and influential membership. With the infusion of some degree of system and order into the Virginia Society by the adoption of the proposed By-Laws and resolutions, we should, within a reasonable time, greatly increase our roll of members and thereby make our funds respectable. Surely with an original membership of two hundred and seventy-nine (279) and more to draw from, it is not unreasonable to expect *at least* one hundred (100) new members shortly, and that number alone would add \$15,000 to our "Permanent Beneficiary Fund" and we would have the annual interest to use for the general purposes of the Society.

It is doubtless true that many of the illegal customs and rules now prevailing in the Society generally, may be, with some modifications, desirable and advantageous changes of

the Original Institution ; many of them made so by the growth and new conditions in the thirteen (13) original States. Such being the case, it is important that the whole subject should be taken up at this time in a harmonious, orderly and regular manner. The precise method for this procedure, happily for us, is provided for in the Institution itself where it says, "each State meeting shall write annually, or *oftener*, if necessary, a circular letter to "the State Societies, noting whatever they may think worthy of observation, respecting the "good of the Society."

This covers fully the questions of the *propriety* and the *legality* of the paper containing the Preambles and Resolves which I have prepared, and which, if you adopt it, will be the circular letter not only *authorized*, but *directed* by the Institution to be sent out. In my judgment this is the most feasible *legal* method to accomplish the much needed reforms in the government, customs, rules and methods of the Cincinnati Society, which will promote its best interests and "conduce to the general intendment of the Society," and which will restore the whole Society to a homogeneous body composed of "one Society of Friends" in the true meaning of the Founders of the Order, and as actually existed in the earlier years of its history.

All of our members will agree, no doubt, that we should have proper rules and regulations for the orderly conduct of our own State Society and in accordance with the practice of the other State Societies under the authority of the Institution. The By-Laws that I have prepared are in accordance with the Institution. Some of the provisions of the Institution, I feel all of us will admit, might be advantageously amended, but *until the Institution is legally amended* let us follow it in *our* By-Laws and then we can go with clean hands to our Sister State Societies, and, in a friendly and broad-minded spirit, ask them to unite with us in all proper and legitimate efforts to amend the Institution in such a way as will promote the welfare, the prosperity and the *harmony* of the whole Cincinnati Society. Some of the reasons for the proposed By-Laws may be briefly stated as follows:

1. To make suitable provision for a Permanent Beneficial Fund, "in order to form "funds which may be respectable and assist the unfortunate," and "which shall remain forever to the use of the State Society; the interest only of which, if necessary, to be appropriated to the relief of the unfortunate," in accordance with the Principles of the Institution.

2. To conform to the Original Institution, and the true meaning and intention of the Founders of the Order and to so continue until the Original Institution is regularly and legally amended by concurrent action of the various State Societies.

3. To avoid, as far as possible, the chance of ever having the Society's affairs managed and controlled exclusively by a very few members thereof, and to the exclusion of the large majority of its members.

4. To secure the active participation in the management of the Virginia Cincinnati Society by the largest number of its members.

5. To obtain proper and suitable members to represent each one of the large number of "rights" to membership now dormant in the Virginia Society.

6. To increase, by all proper means, the dignity, usefulness and importance of the Virginia Society in particular, and the Cincinnati Society in general.

7. To stimulate and encourage the doctrines of the Institution that the Cincinnati is "one Society of Friends," and "the uniting in acts of brotherly affection and bonds of perpetual friendship the members constituting the same."

8. To obviate the occasion or necessity of any one member holding several important offices in the Cincinnati Society at any one time.

9. To keep *all* the members of the Virginia Society fully informed about *all* the affairs of the Society, which includes the management, finances, membership, etc., etc. At present very few of our members have any knowledge whatever of these matters and this condition is a great detriment to the growth and prosperity of the Society.

10. The systematic keeping and preservation of full, proper and accurate records of all meetings of the Society and committees thereof, together with accurate membership and other records as set forth in the By-Laws.

11. To elect suitable and proper Honorary members in accordance with the provisions of the Institution and to the full limit as authorized therein.

12. To enable the Society to hold its chief annual meeting at a suitable and pleasant season of the year when the largest number of members can conveniently attend.

13. To cause the annual meetings to be sociably enjoyable, by providing for a banquet, etc., and also occasions of dignity and ceremony by arranging for semi-public meetings at which patriotic and instructive addresses will be made by well-known Orators and Statesmen, and to which special invitations will be issued to prominent and important people.

14. To clearly define the rules and regulations of the Society in all important matters, in order to prevent confusion and misunderstanding with respect thereto, and to avoid violations of the Institution of the Cincinnati Society, and the By-Laws of the Virginia Society.

And now, brother members of the Cincinnati, just a few words more about the general subject that has brought us together to-day. It is perhaps true that none of us heretofore have taken the Cincinnati Society quite seriously enough. We have been content to let things go as they have been going, and have not taken the time or trouble to post ourselves about the affairs and management of our Society. I, for one, confess it with humiliation and contrition. We have been satisfied to sit down with folded hands and let others interpret, *and very often misinterpret*, the Institution of the Society. We should to-day adopt such a system in our affairs, as is expressed in the proposed By-Laws, which will keep each of our members fully informed about our State Society and thus enable our members to take the management of the affairs of the Virginia Society into their own hands, and not put this burden upon the shoulders of any one or two men. When the opposite course is pursued our members naturally lose that personal and individual interest which is so necessary and

essential to the continued growth and prosperity of our Order. Each one of us from this time forward should take an active, intelligent and useful interest in all the affairs of our State Society and conduct it in a dignified, orderly and business-like manner.

It seems to me that we, of the Virginia Cincinnati, should earnestly endeavor to carry out the purpose of the Founders of the Society in making and keeping the Cincinnati an *active* force—not a half-dead, inert body as it has so often appeared in the recent past. It is not enough that we increase our membership,—not enough that we meet together annually,—not enough that we contribute \$25 or \$50 each year to one or more needy descendants of original members,—not enough that we are willing, and sometimes eager to accept the spectacular glory of office in the Society,—not enough that we are proud of having it known among our friends and the world at large that we are members of this old historic Military Order. I venture to say, Mr. Chairman and fellow members of the Virginia Cincinnati, these things, however praiseworthy in themselves, are *not* enough. We should also get in touch with, and keep in touch with, all of our members. Encourage them to come to the meetings. Impress upon them the idea of our sympathy and friendliness, collectively as “one Society of Friends,” and individually as members of the same. “These things ye should do and not leave the others undone.”

The annual meetings of our Virginia Society have been melancholy and gloomy affairs. At times not more than six or seven present and often less than that number. The excessive heat prevailing at that season (July 4) causing each person to be thoroughly uncomfortable and heartily glad when the meeting is over. There is nothing about such meetings to interest or instruct, and surely nothing that would or could “conduce to the general intendment of the Society,” to use the language of the Institution. I am persuaded you will agree with me the time has come for some suitable action on our part which will put new life and energy into the affairs of our Society. We need “a resurrection of the dead bones.” The adoption of suitable methods to secure and retain the active interest of *all* our present and future members in the affairs of the Society. A return to and encouragement of the teaching of the Institution that we are indeed “one Society of Friends,” holding our *Chief* annual meetings at a pleasant season of the year and making them socially enjoyable, interesting and instructive to ourselves and to others.

Let us then see to it to-day that we adopt the best measures to promote the Principles of the Institution. It was surely never intended by the Founders for the various State Societies to have different laws from the Institution and from each other, as to the admission of members, assessment dues, eagle of the Order, meeting dates, etc., etc., but to follow the organic law in these and other things *until that law is legally amended by concurrent action of all the State Societies, which is the only legal way by which it can be amended.*

For the good of the Society let us all unite in a broad-minded spirit to infuse into our Virginia Cincinnati a large degree of life and energy, proper order and system, and thus promote in every reasonable way the dignity and prosperity of the Cincinnati Society.



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